'Miniwar' Laid to Marine Deserter

MIAMI, Fla. (AP) — Charles Smith is a U.S. Marine who has spent most of his time of late in jails and jungle camps. The U.S. Government says he has been trying to launch his own miniwar.

In the past five months, Smith has been a deserter twice, charged with murder once, arrested in a secret jungle training cemp and accused of trying to invade his homeland, the Caribbean island nation of Haiti.

The Marine Corps say Smith —still a private first class after four years in uniform — has deserted three times. His most recent escape, the Marines say, came last April at Camp Lejeune, N.C., while he was under guard and wearing handcuffs.

Now he is in the Dade County Jail at Miami, charged with conspiracy to launch a military expedition against a friendly country, Haiti. Smith has been unable to raise $50,000 bond. Even if he could, he faces a hold order on the desertion charge.

Invasion Planned

Smith and eight other men are charged with attempting to invade Haiti, the country where Smith was born 21 years ago. And Haiti has been connected with all of his recent brushes with the law.

The latest episode began when a carbine-carrying posse followed a dead man's trail deep into the Florida Everglades last March 13. Monroe County Sheriff Robert Brown said the officers found 12 heavily armed men training with live ammunition in a jungle camp. Eugene Maximilien, the Haitian consul general in Miami, said the camouflage-clad men were training to invade his country.

A day before the raid, Florida Highway Patrol troopers answering a telephoned report of a shooting 50 miles deep in the swampy wilds of the Everglades, stopped a car carrying Gerald D. Baker,a Haitian who had been shot in the chest. He was dead on arrival at a Miami hospital.

Deputies swarmed into the area. Smith and the 11 other men surrendered without a fight. The posse seized 16 pistols, 16 rifles and a collection of knives.

Charge Dropped

A murder charge was lodged against Smith and accessory complaints against the other men. But a coroner's jury empanelled in the Florida Keye ruled Baker was killed "by a gunshot wound by a person or persons unknown." The charges against Smith and his companions were dropped.

Monroe County Detective Sgt. A. C. Vidal testified at the hearing that Baker was shot during a practice skirmish at the exile guerrilla training site. Vidal said shots were fired by men practicing as an attack force and men acting as an ambush squad.

After the murder charge was dropped, Smith was handed over to the Marine Barracks at the naval air station in Key West. He traveled through a series of brigs to Camp Lejeune where he had been missing since February. Smith arrived at the camp at 5:40 p.m. last April 10. Less than eight hours later he was gone again.

A source close to the Haitian exile colony said he was told the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency helped Smith escape. The source said the young Marine — again listed as a deserter — was hidden in Canada until a bombing raid was staged on Port au Prince, the Haitian capital, on June 4.

Smith disappeared from public view until June 4 when he and nine other men —all garbed in flying suits — strode from a bullet-riddled plane that landed at an American missile tracking station on Grand Bahamas Island. The plane was almost out of fuel. The 10 men were arrested and nine, Smith among them, were deported to Miami. The 10th man, William Dempsey, was held for Canadian authorities.

The shot-up plane that landed in the Bahamas was similar to a four-engine Constellation that a few hours earlier dumped six barrels of gasoline with burning fuses on Port au Prince, Smith's home town. Only one of the drums exploded. The Haitian government said two adults and a 6-month-old child were killed.

One of the barrels landed in the courtyard of President Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

A source close to the raiders said the plane began its mission from Miami, landed on South Caicos Island at the southeastern tip of the Bahamas and then made its run on Port au Prince. Haitian officials also alleged the plane's last stop was South Caicos Island.

The source said the raids were only on a dry run to prove to unidentified financial backers "that it could be done."

A Federal grand jury in Washington indicted Smith and six others on conspiracy charges July 9. The indictments also name Rene J. Leon, Martin F. X. Casey, Lawrence J. Carlin, Howard K. Davis, Ralph G. Edens and Edmund Kolby. Another man was released without charge, one was charged but not indicted and a third was turned over to Canadian authorities.

Casey, an American, and Leon, a 45-year-old Haitian, were free on bonds to appeal a previous conviction on charges of trying to invade Haiti.

Casey flashed a faint smile as he admitted at his arraignment in Miami he had been arrested in 1967 along with 71 other persons as a boatload of battleclad adventurers prepared to leave the Florida Keys for Haiti.

Associated Press

Marine deserter Charles Smith walks out of Everglades, followed by deputies who closed down a jungle camp where a man had been killed. Haitian consul in Miami charged the campers were training to invade Haiti.